Faith, Fish, Farm or Family?

The Impact of Kinship Links and Communities on Migration Choices and Residential Persistence in North Devon 1841-1901

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signed electronically  Janet Few
Abstract

From Ravenstein1 onwards, historians considering the causes of migration have stressed the importance of economic factors. Whilst work related issues have been shown to prompt the majority of migrations, the role of extended kin deserves further attention. Plakans and Wetherell found that, the ‘placing [of the] domestic group within a larger kin context’, seen as the next logical research step as long ago as the 1970s, was an issue that remained largely unaddressed in 2003.2 Here the impact of the extended family, on migration decisions and the likelihood of residential persistence, is investigated.

Evidence for community cohesion has been sought and kinship links have been investigated; both have been found to influence the residential patterns of individuals. This research has revealed that, whilst economics may provide the impetus for a move, cultural factors and the role of non-resident kin played a far greater part in the decision to migrate, or not, than most previous studies have acknowledged. It has been shown that, although kinship impacted upon both, reasons for emigration were very different from those for migration. The substantial role played by religious belief, not only as a motivation for the emigration of extended family groups, but also as an issue influencing the choice of destination, is a particular feature of the findings of this study.

In 1994, Pryce and Drake were ‘making a strong plea for the adoption of rigorous intellectual approaches in migration research’3 and the methods used here address this appeal. A technique of total reconstruction and longitudinal tracing has been employed in order to investigate the inhabitants of three small areas of North Devon.4 A comprehensive range of sources has been used and an in-depth examination of exemplar migrants and the residually persistent, has allowed possible motivations to be scrutinised. In this way, the details of the structures and processes observed become

4 Bucks Mills, Bulkworthy and Conduit Street, Hatherleigh.
clearer. In the context of family reconstitution, Barry Reay wrote of ‘a dearth of such studies of nineteenth-century England’ and it is intended that the methods used in this research will facilitate a wider understanding of the factors that motivated migrants in Victorian rural England.

Whilst considering the influences of kin and community on migration patterns in the three study areas, the relative roles of other factors have been taken into account. It has been necessary to look at economic patterns and to investigate how, for example, farming and fishing, and any nineteenth century changes therein, affected the lives of the inhabitants. In an area where, and at a time when, non-conformist religion took a particular hold, the effect that the faith of these individuals had on their decisions to move, or stay put, has been assessed. Thus, the issues of faith, fish, farm and family are all borne in mind when studying the motivations for the migration decisions of the inhabitants of the three settlements.

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